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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of randomly selected school library media specialists participating in the Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Texas state "child choice" book award programs to identify any censorship taking place in these programs, and the attitudes of the library media specialists toward such censorship. In most child-choice state book award programs, children and adults nominate books to be placed in competition following specified guidelines. A preliminary list of books is formulated by a selection committee of adults, who pare down the number of titles and arrive at a master list that is distributed throughout the state. To make the selection of titles easier, many book lists are provided to librarians with annotations that include the price, literary genre, and a one-sentence summary. In some state programs, these lists also indicate whether the book would be a good choice for reading aloud. In a number of programs, the master list of nominated titles comes with a disclaimer designed to handle problems that could arise in different areas of the state because of different local values and beliefs. Thus, the list that the children are permitted to vote on can be heavily preselected. The data analyzed here are based on responses received from 55 media specialists from each state, a 20% return rate on the questionnaire. Responses to an open-ended statement on the questionnaire showed that censorship was in operation all five state programs: it was expected and accepted. Problem areas in which censorship was condoned included unacceptable language, subject matter, and situations, and contemporary realistic fiction. Censorship practices identified by the study resulted from the preselection by adults of the books to be voted on by the children. Such "silent censorship" was found to be influenced by teachers' concerns about the suitability of materials for reading aloud; librarians' concerns about the possibility of offending teachers; the omission of controversial books from the master list by the selection committee; and the practice of expurgation of the original book for a paperback edition. However, not all of the respondents condoned the censorship in these programs, and research to determine what librarians and media specialists do to prevent censorship would be helpful. (4 references) (MAB)

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CENSORSHIP AND CHILD-CHOICE STATE BOOK AWARD PROGRAMS

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CENSORSHIP AND CHILD-CHOICE STATE BOOK AWARD PROGRAMS

In a study of child-choice state book award programs, Jordan (1979) found that while the programs investigated were popular, censorship of nominees and winners was definitely in operation. Jordan reported that one California respondent noted that a group of teachers felt the content of nominees wasn't sufficiently censored. On the other hand, participants in Oklahoma felt librarians practiced too much censorship. Jordan also cited a South Carolina librarian who thought that "program administrators felt there has been too much censorship on the part of librarians" (Jordan, 83).

THE BASIC AWARD PROGRAM

In most child-choice state book award programs, children and adults nominate books to be placed in competition following specified guidelines. In some states the books must have been published within a certain time line, in other states Newbery winners may not be nominated, while in other instances only authors living in the United States may be nominated. A preliminary list of books is formulated by a selection committee of adults. They pare down the number of titles and arrive at a master list that is distributed throughout the state. Thus it can be said that adults have an important role in selecting the books for the master list. Gerhardt (1982) stated that "nevertheless, many teachers and librarians mount book prize exercises for which they do all the administrative and publicity work before and after THE CHILDREN are permitted to vote on heavily preselected titles" (Gerhardt, 5).

Depending on the state program, schools are required to purchase a certain number of titles from the master list in order for their children to participate. Additionally, in order for the children to vote they must have read or heard read a specified number of nominated books. Finally the children vote for the book they believe should win the honor and the award is given.

DISCUSSION

State book award programs provide media specialists/librarians with a ready made list of current titles that will be commonly read and shared by children and adults across the state. For the most part, these nominees are age/grade appropriate in terms of reading and interest levels. While the titles have passed the inspection of a selection committee, it may be that not everyone will be pleased with the results. Across the board, librarians/media specialists are adding books to their school libraries that they did not personally select. Thus there is an opportunity for some to include titles in their collection because they are award possibilities, not because the books are approved of or liked.

To make selection of titles easier, many book lists are provided to librarians with annotations. Most often, the information includes a bibliography, price, literary genre, and a one sentence summary. In some state programs, notations as to whether the book would be a good read aloud is also noted.

In a number of child-choice state book award programs, the master list of nominees came with a disclaimer of sorts. The disclaimer is designed to handle problems that could arise in different areas of the state due to different local values and beliefs. In brief, program materials from several states read as follows:

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1. THE NEBRASKA GOLDEN SOWER CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD:

"This proposed reading list has been formulated by a selection committee of specialists in children's literature. (The list was made up of nominees sent in from across the state.) The local school officials have the responsibility to select the books from the list which they feel are appropriate to their particular interests."

2. THE OKLAHOMA SEQUOYAH AWARD

"The master list is not intended to be an automatic recommendation because selection policies vary greatly across Oklahoma. One should apply specific selection guidelines, ALA [American Library Association] Notable Books or any other specialized list."

3. TEXAS BLUEBONNET AWARD

"The master list titles were selected by the TBA Committee after receiving suggestions from librarians, teachers, and students across the state. The above books, although recommended by one or more reviewing tools, need to be evaluated in terms of each library's individual selection policy. It is not mandatory that a school or public library purchase all of the titles."

4. ARKANSAS CHARLIE MAY SIMON AWARD

"Several of the books are excellent for reading aloud, but teachers and librarians should acquaint themselves with the books and make selections for reading aloud with their students in mind."

5. TENNESSEE CHILDREN'S CHOICE BOOK AWARD

Question: "What if a school objects to any titles on the list?"

Answer: "You may not want to use all the books as some may not be suitable for your age group. Each librarian is encouraged to follow a locally adopted selection policy and to use critical reviews when making purchases."

6. VERMONT DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER AWARD

"The Dorothy Canfield Fisher books are carefully selected and highly recommended by a committee of eight, but because maturity level and interest level may vary from community to community, each library should choose books in accord with its own Selection Policy."

7. GEORGIA'S CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD

"ERRA - Especially Recommended for Reading Aloud books, are those deemed especially suitable for reading aloud. Not having an ERRA designation should not necessarily be interpreted as a comment about the book's language or subject matter. It may simply refer to the length and complexity of the text, which makes it best suited for independent reading."

8. MISSOURI MARK TWAIN AWARD

"Books on the Mark Twain list are selected to provide quality reading for a variety of tastes and interests. Teachers and librarians should read these titles to determine appropriateness for local situations."

It can be seen that book award program officials are concerned about the selection policies that are put into effect when choosing books for the master list. While many librarians/ media specialists say they are concerned with selection, many would say the disclaimer of sorts is a form of censorship that is operating at certain levels of the program.

THE PROBLEM

In an attempt to provide more information regarding censorship within child-choice state book award programs, librarians/media specialists enrolled in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Carolina and Texas state programs were surveyed to ascertain their attitudes regarding censorship practices.

THE POPULATION

The population of this survey is made up of the 55 professionals from each state who responded. The librarians/media specialists were randomly selected from lists of schools in each state. There was a 20% return rate on the questionnaires.

State Award	First year award given	School grades participating	Average # years participated	Population range of schools in survey
Colorado Book Award	1976	Elementary grades	5	42-2,200
Kansas William Allen White Award	1953	4-8	11	108-1,000
Nebraska Golden Sower Award	1981	4-6	3	4-635
South Carolina Award	1976	4-6	6	184-1,262
Texas Bluebonnet	1981	3-6	4	261-1,129

THE SURVEY

As part of a survey on child-choice book award programs the participants were asked to complete the following open-ended statement:

With your state book award censorship _____.

THE FINDINGS

	Colorado	Kansas	Nebraska	South Carolina	Texas
Censorship is done	38%	44%	44%	38%	31%
Censorship is no problem	35%	18%	18%	38%	31%
No response to item	33%	38%	38%	24%	38%
2% = 1 response N = 55 respondents per state					
responses presented as percentages					
percentages rounded to the nearest whole number					

In keeping with the Jordan study (1979), the responses to the open-ended statement showed that censorship was in operation in all five state programs: it was expected and accepted. Reasons cited for censorship revealed concern on the part of classroom teachers, especially in relation to reading stories aloud. Problem areas included unacceptable language, subject matter, situations, and contemporary realistic fiction. Those who were in favor of censorship usually felt that it is necessary because of the age/grade span of the students, that it should be stricter, and it should be enforced more often in order not to offend teachers. One Kansan noted that censorship should "be prudently applied to the nominees."

The nomination and selection process where children and adults nominate, and adults compile the master list works for some participants. For others this system is a bane to their existence. One Kansan indicated that they "didn't know the committee's criteria for the choices that they make." A Colorado participant lamented "none of the books my school has nominated have ever been in the contest. Rumor has it that adults really chose them, not kids!?" In any event, many a librarian/media specialist surveyed here indicated that they relied heavily on the selection committee's choices when choosing books to buy for the upcoming school year.

In reaction to censorship difficulties, media specialists/librarians mentioned in the survey that they would like the annotations to be more comprehensive. One South Carolina participant said that "committee members have tried to notify elementary librarians if subject matter is beyond scope of earlier readers." One Nebraskan noted that "perhaps mention of 'questionable' read-alouds in the blurbs might be helpful." Another Nebraskan commented that "if there is an element that may be a problem in certain communities, only a note should be given to alert librarians or media specialists to this issue." Regretfully, such "tagging" of titles would no doubt be an open invitation for the promotion or de-selection and self-censorship on the parts of the librarians/media specialists the "blurbs" were to "help." Watson (1981) found that when book reviews were marked with a warning, personal opinions definitely came into play during the

selection procedure. He concluded that "book selectors avoid selecting children's books containing objectionable content as identified by someone else...." (Watson, 34).

It was interesting to note that at times a contradiction of terms was being perpetuated when librarians believed that 1. censorship didn't take place but 2. the selection committee had a heavy hand in determining what books the children nominated were or were not appropriate. A participant from Kansas noted that censorship "was not necessary as they [the nominees] are screened thoroughly according to midwest values." A Texan commented that "censorship is not a real problem because the nominating committee seldom allows controversial books on the list." Another Kansan indicated that "censorship is rarely needed locally because the committee does it." A Colorado respondent noted that "I guess no controversial subjects or authors are selected." Adding a different slant to the position is one Nebraskan who wrote "there is a potential for censorship because children do the nominating rather than the adults."

A number of the participants who noted that they personally had nothing to do with censorship qualified their answers in terms of censorship not being a problem "here," or "at my school" or "on this side of the state." On Nebraskan commented that censorship, while not now a problem could be one in the future because "our town is very conservative and prefers that the children don't read about sorcerers, witches, etc." A Kansan indicated that censorship wasn't a problem "yet", however "there have been instances when a teacher did not like a book but never to the point of banning." Finally one South Carolina respondent said that censorship was not considered in the program and that "the books are on the shelf for the children to read but I do tell the teacher if she asks, then she might object to reading part of it out loud." In response to the whole issue, a South Carolina participant indicated that "the SCBA [South Carolina Children's Book Award] books usually get away with a little more than other books." One Kansan retorted "with almost any book someone could find something objectionable."

CONCLUSION

The winner of the second Nebraska Golden Sower Award Yours Til Niagara Falls, Abby by Jane O'Connor was a victim of silent censorship in terms of expurgation. The hard bound copy of the book, published by Hastings House (1979) does not match word for word with the Scholastic (1981) paperback edition. Words, sentences, phrases, and even paragraphs were omitted from the Scholastic paperback edition. In response to the practice of such expurgation, the American Library Association took the stand that librarians/media specialists should not have to defend two different copies/stories of the same books and should be told that expurgation is being practiced (Expurgation, 1983).

Censorship is definitely in operation in five state book award programs where librarians/ media specialists were surveyed for this study. Censorship is expected. It is accepted. Attitudes condoning censorship are more prevalent due to certain factors (language, sex, realistic fiction). A high percentage of those polled indicate that there is a problem in terms of infringement of intellectual rights of those who participate in the programs. It is the children in these programs who do not know that silent censorship is being used to dictate what they will or will not be able to vote for as a state award winner.

There is a need for more research to be done in terms of attitudes regarding censorship and state book award programs. Because librarians/media specialists are ordering and shelving books they did not personally select, there is room for the differences where one librarian would stock a book when another would shun the same title. Ironically, when asked to comment on the weakness of the Nebraska Golden Sower Reading Award program, one participant noted that "the way we operate now, media specialists 'censor' nominees and some kids never get a chance to see some selections." While censorship is expected and accepted in these five state programs, there are those participants who do not condone this practice. Thus it would be helpful to have research determine what librarians and media specialists do to prevent censorship.

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